SAMPLE CONSTITUTIONS

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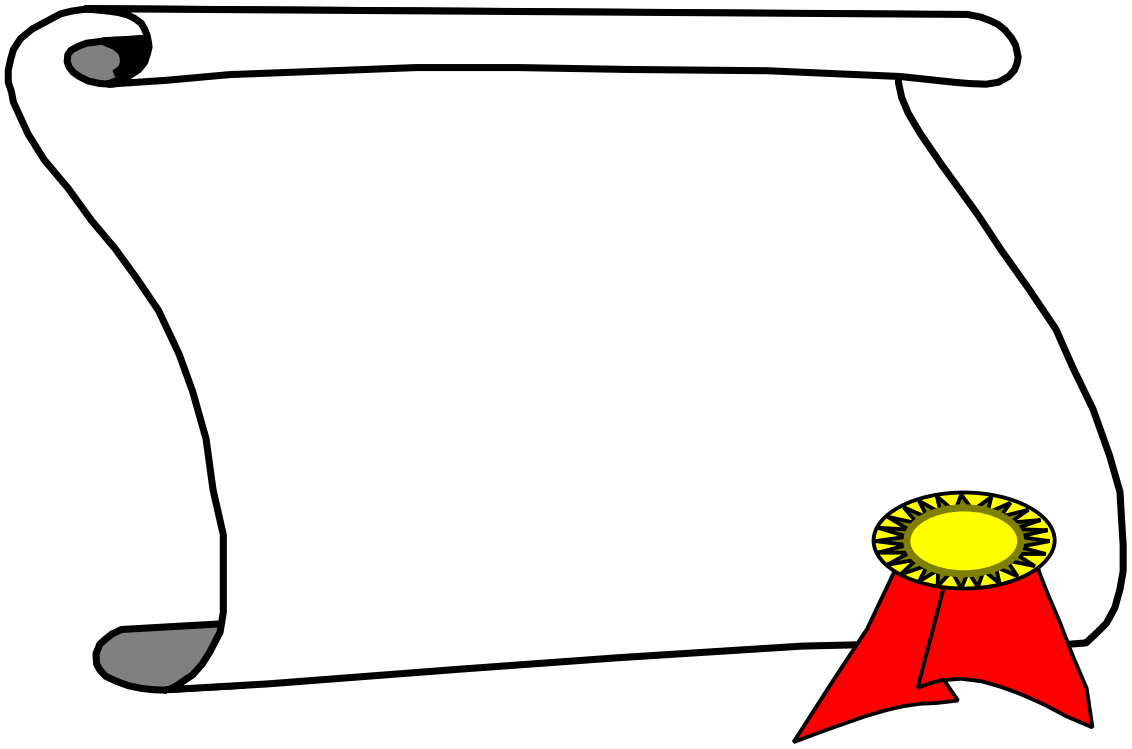


BYLAWS FOR THE

NEW CHURCH START

(The following is a sample of a church Constitution and Bylaws. This can be revised and fitted to any local church's need/situation.)

The Constitution and Bylaws Committee of _____(name of church)_____ met last __(date)___, discussed, and approved the first draft of the Constitution and Bylaws for recommendation of their approval by the Church Council. The Church Council met last _____(date)_____, discussed and approved the proposed Constitution and Bylaws and will recommend for their ratification at the church business meeting.

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

Constitution and Bylaws of _____(name of church)_____

Preamble

This Constitution and Bylaws are made to:

1. Preserve and secure the principles of our faith.
2. Preserve the liberties of each individual member of the church.
3. Ensure freedom of action of independence from any religious body or organization.
4. Provide for orderly conduct of internal affairs, in dealing with others, and of governing church members.

I. Name

The name of this church shall be _____. It shall be affiliated with the _____ Baptist Association, _____(state)_____ Baptist Convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention.

II. Business Location

The address of the principal office of this church shall be: _____.

III. Purpose

The purposes of _____(name of church)_____ are:

1. To worship and serve God and to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ as set forth in Matthew 28:19-20.

2. To minister to the needs of the members and others as the church is able to do so.

3. To do any and all things related to and in connection with the carrying out of the object and purpose herein above set forth.

IV. Articles of Faith

1. We believe the Holy Bible as the inspired Word of God, without any error, the all-sufficient authority in matters of faith, doctrine, and Christian living.

2. We believe in one God, eternally existing in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

3. We believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ, and that He is true God and man. He died on the cross for our sins. He rose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of the Father and is now our High Priest and Advocate.

4. We believe that man was created in the image of God but fell into sin and therefore lost. Only through regeneration by the work of the Holy Spirit can man's salvation and spiritual life be obtained.

5. We believe that eternal salvation is the free gift of God, entirely apart from man's works, and is possessed by any and all who have faith in and receive Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

6. We believe in a regenerated church membership: that is, persons old enough to understand their need for Jesus Christ and, of their own free will, accepted Him as their personal Lord and Savior.

7. We believe that baptism is by immersion and the Lord's Supper is a memorial to His suffering and death on the cross. These are ordinances to be observed by the church in its present age. They are, however, not to be regarded as means for man's salvation.

8. We believe in the personal, bodily, imminent, and glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ and that His Second Coming inspires believers for dynamic and zealous life and service for Him while waiting for His return.

9. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead, the everlasting blessedness of the saved in heaven, and the everlasting punishment and separation from God of the unsaved in hell.

10. We believe in the autonomy of the local church. The church shall manage its own affairs and shall not be subject to any other religious body or organization.

11. We subscribe to the "Baptist Faith and Message" adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963 as our larger statement of faith with scriptural references.

V. Government

The government of _____(name of church)_____ is vested in its members. The membership retains unto itself the right of exclusive self-government in all phases of its life and organization. It recognizes the needs for mutual counsel and cooperation, which are common among Baptist churches. This church will cooperate with and mutually work with _____ Baptist Church, _____ Baptist Association, _____Baptist Convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention.

VI. Nonprofit Status and Liquidation

This church is not organized for profit. In the event of liquidation or dissolution of the church, all of its assets and property of every nature and description whatsoever shall be paid over and transferred at the direction of the trustees to the _____Baptist Association, _____Baptist Convention or both, to the Southern Baptist Convention.

VII. Amendment

This Constitution and Bylaws may be amended provided the proposed amendment shall have been presented in writing at a regular church business meeting and then circulated to the membership. Amendments to this Constitution and Bylaws shall be two-thirds vote of members of the church who are qualified to vote and are present in the business meeting with a quorum to discuss and vote for this matter.

BYLAWS

I. Church Membership

A. Qualifications:

Membership of _____(name of Church)_____ shall consist of people have made a profession of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and who, having been scripturally baptized by immersion, and are in agreement with the Articles of Faith, and Covenant of the church. (Church Covenant to be written soon).

B. Reception:

Membership in the church may be attained by majority vote of the church in any of its regular business meetings and in one of the following manners:

1. By scriptural baptism by immersion after profession of faith in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior.
2. By transfer of church letter from another Baptist church.
3. By a statement of faith of their prior experience of conversion and scriptural baptism by immersion in another evangelical church of like faith and practice.
4. By restoration to the church membership after having been dropped.

C. Termination:

Membership in this church shall be terminated when a member:

1. Requests a letter of transfer to join another Baptist church.
2. Is dropped from the roll of membership when he or she joins another kind of church. A letter of transfer is not necessary.
3. Dies

4. Is dismissed by a vote of the church due to reasons and circumstances provided in the church discipline. The pastor and deacons will do all they can to counsel the member for restoration prior to action of dismissal or a request of the member to be dismissed from the church membership.

D. Orientation of New Members:

Candidates for membership and new members need to attend the Church Membership Class to learn and understand the privileges and responsibilities of members to God and the church.

1. Members in good standing shall have the right to a voice and vote in all church transactions and shall have the right and privileges to full participation in the life and work of the church.

2. It shall be the duty of church members to uphold the Articles of Faith, Constitution and Bylaws, and Covenant of the Church.

II. Church Officers

All church officers must be members of the church in good standing.

A. The Pastor:

1. The qualifications for pastor shall be consistent with those listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. His training, skills, and experiences are needed in this area of leadership.

2. His responsibilities:

(a) These generally fall into the following areas: Preaching, teaching, pastoral counseling, administration, planning, and guiding the church to grow and fulfill its purposes.

(b) He shall lead the church, the organizations, and all leaders of the church in performing their tasks in worship, proclamation, education, and evangelism.

(c) The pastor shall be an ex officio member of all church standing committees, except the Pastor's Selection Committee.

(d) He shall assist the deacons in securing pulpit supply for times in his absence.

3. Call:

(a) A pastor shall be chosen and called whenever a vacancy occurs.

(b) A Pastor's Selection Committee shall be appointed by the church to seek out a suitable pastor and this committee's recommendation will serve as a nomination.

(c) The Pastor's Selection Committee will recommend only one candidate at a time.

(d) The pastor's election shall take place at a meeting called for that purpose, of which at least one week notice shall be given to the members.

(e) An affirmative vote of three-fourths (3/4) of those present is necessary for a choice.

4. Terms of Service:

(a) The chosen pastor shall serve until the relationship is terminated by either his request or that of the church. In either case, at least sixty (60) days' notice shall be given unless otherwise mutually agreed.

(b) There shall be a written mutual contract/agreement made between the pastor and the church.

B. Church Staff:

This church shall employ or call staff, as it shall need.

1. Staff members other than that of the pastor shall be recommended for employment by the Church Council or a special committee.

2. A written job description and mutual contract/agreement will be prepared when the need for church staff is determined.

C. Deacons:

1. Number, term of office:

There shall be five (5) deacons for the first 100 resident members and one (1) for each additional fifty (50) of portion thereof. Deacons shall be elected for a term of service of three years or longer term of service as voted upon by the church.

2. Qualifications:

(a) A church deacon must meet the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

(b) A deacon shall demonstrate an exemplary Christian testimony in private, family, and public life; a committed Christian leader and partner of the pastor; supporter and promoter of the church faith, practice, programs, and ministries.

3. Election:

(a) When a deacon vacancy occurs, the chairman of the Deacons Committee shall announce that an election of a deacon will be held during a named church business meeting.

(b) The Deacon Committee will enlist active men to be recommended to the church. The duties, qualifications, and importance of the office of a deacon will

be interpreted to the candidates and be reviewed to the church prior to the schedule election of deacons.

4. Ordination:

(a) Selection, election, and ordination of deacons is a privilege of the local church.

(b) When ordination of deacons is planned by the church, it shall authorize the pastor to assemble a council to examine the candidates concerning their fit to serve as deacons.

(c) The council directed to examine the deacons shall be composed of the pastor, invited ordained pastors, and deacons of neighboring sister Baptist churches.

(d) When the council recommends the ordination of deacons, the ordination service shall be scheduled as led by the pastor.

5. Duties:

(a) Elected deacons shall elect the chairman of their committee.

(b) Deacons serve as a committee of counsel to assist the pastor concerning the progress and welfare of the church.

(c) Assist the pastor in ministering to the members by implementing the Deacon Family Ministry.

(d) Seek to solve any fellowship problem of the church.

(e) Assist the pastor in administering the church ordinances.

(f) Serve as church membership committee.

(g) In the absence of the pastor, the chairman of the Deacons Committee shall serve as an advisory member to all organizations, departments, and committees of the church.

D. Moderator:

1. The church moderator may be the pastor or a lay leader elected to this position.

2. The moderator shall preside at all regular and called business meetings of the church.

3. In the absence of the moderator, the chairman of deacons shall preside of the regular and called business meetings of the church.

4. In the absence of the moderator and the chairman of deacons, the church clerk shall call the church to order and an acting moderator will be elected.

E. Clerk:

1. The church clerk shall be elected and be responsible for keeping an accurate record of all business meeting transactions of the church and preparing the annual report to the association.

2. He or she shall keep a register of the names and addresses of the church members, with dates of admission, dismissal, dedication of children, and deaths of members of the church family.

3. He or she shall issue letters of dismissal voted by the church and write letters of transfer of membership, prepare written reports of the church, and keep an accurate history of the church.

4. An assistant church clerk may be elected or the clerk's responsibilities shall be delegated to a church secretary if and when the church can afford to employ one.

F. Treasurer:

1. The church treasurer shall be elected as the custodian of all moneys of the church and shall disburse these moneys by checks as authorized by the church.

2. He or she shall keep, at all times, an itemized account of all receipts and disbursements and shall render a monthly and annually written report of this account to the church.

3. The treasurer's report shall be audited annually by an auditing committee.

G. Financial Secretary:

1. The church financial secretary shall be elected and shall be responsible for seeing that the offerings are properly received, counted, and deposited in the church's bank account.

2. He or she shall properly credit each contributor and their offerings.

3. He or she shall be responsible for preparing for mailing a quarterly or annual record of contribution to donors.

H. Trustees:

1. At least three (3) trustees shall be elected by the church to hold trust the property of the church.

2. They shall have no power to buy, sell, mortgage, lease, or transfer any property of the church without a specific vote of the church authorizing each action.

3. It shall be the function of the trustees to sign any, and all legal documents involving the sale, mortgage, purchase, or lease of church property or any other legal documents requiring the signature of the trustees for and in behalf of the church.

I. Church Council:

1. The Church Council shall have as regular members the pastor, clerk, treasurer, chairman of deacons, Sunday School director, discipleship director,

chairperson of each church standing committee, presidents of men's, women's, and youth fellowships.

2. The Church Council shall be to recommend to the church objectives and goals; review the coordinated program plans recommended by the pastor, church officers, organizations, and committees; to recommend to the church the use of leadership, calendar time, and other resources according to program priorities; and to evaluate program achievements in terms of church goals and objectives.

3. All matters agreed on by the Church Council calling for action not already provided for shall be referred to the church to be voted upon.

K. Vacancies:

In case of vacancy in any office, except that of the pastor and staff members, the vacancy shall be filled by the church at a regular or special meeting as soon as possible after such vacancy has occurred.

III. Church Committees

All church committee members shall be elected by the church from nominations presented by the Nominating Committee, and nominations from the floor with the consent of the nominee. There shall be a minimum of three (3) committee members with a chairperson. Any committee member elected to fill any vacancy shall serve the unexpired term of the position vacated. Each committee chairperson shall submit an annual budget request to the Budget and Finance Committee.

A. Nominating Committee:

The Nominating Committee shall be responsible throughout the year for nominating and presenting to the church people to serve in various positions of the church (unless provided for otherwise in these Bylaws) vacated by expiration of term of office, by death, by resignation, or by removal. Each person contacted shall be informed of his or her responsibilities.

B. Budget and Finance Committee:

This committee shall have the responsibility of assuring that the adopted budget is adhered to. It shall recommend financial policies to the church and shall foster and promote programs of stewardship. In consultation with the Church Council for the new church year, it shall draw up and submit to the church an annual budget during the month of October for the next calendar year and recommend the chairperson of budget promotion annually. The taking of special offerings shall be approved by this committee. This committee shall be responsible for the annual audit of the treasurer's books.

C. Properties Committee:

This committee shall be responsible in matters to properties administration. Throughout the year, this committee shall give attention to and study the condition and state of repair and appearance of the building and grounds of the church and equipment therein, making arrangements for repairs and improvements authorized by the church and included in the church budget. All matters of major repairs, changes, improvements or items of equipment not included in the budget shall be referred to the Stewardship Committee for fiscal review. Purchase of equipment shall be through this committee unless another

committee is directed specifically to make studies, report to the church, and make necessary arrangements as the church decides.

D. Missions Committee

This committee shall be responsible for discovering possibilities for starting new congregations. If this occurs, this committee will work out a mutual agreement with the church mission congregation(s) as approved by the church. It shall seek also possibilities for local, state, national missions projects, share findings with church program organizations, and serves the church in establishing and conducting such missions projects. This committee shall lead the church in its involvement with the Baptist association, state convention, and other Southern Baptist Convention mission related ministries or programs that mutually benefit the church.

E. Music Committee:

This committee will plan and evaluate the music program of the church, in the formation of choirs in the church and planning special musical programs throughout the year. It is responsible for recommending people for the positions of pianist and organist, song leader, and in assisting the pastor with special music in the regular and other services of the church. In the event that a music director is needed as a staff of the church, this committee will look for a qualified person to be recommended to this compensated position, which requires approval by the church.

F. Youth Committee:

This committee is responsible in planning and coordinating youth programs and activities inside and outside of the church. These activities are to be correlated with the activities of the church program organization in attaining objectives set forth by the church. An

elected representative of the Youth Committee shall serve as a member of the Church Council.

G. Social and Recreation Committee:

This committee shall be responsible for all social and recreation activities of the church, formulating policies and supervising the services rendered to the church through the kitchen and promoting regular church functions to build the fellowship of the church.

H. Kitchen Committee:

This committee shall have general supervision of the supplies, equipment, and use of the church kitchen suggesting to the church rules and regulations as they deem wise. It shall enforce policies necessary to properly maintain the kitchen in a clean, orderly, and acceptable condition.

I. Ordinance Committee:

This committee shall assist the pastor in preparing for the two ordinances of the church. The members of this committee shall be responsible for preparing the candidates and the baptistery for the ordinance of baptism and will prepare the elements of the Lord's Supper.

J. Christian Education Committee:

This committee shall lead the church in developing and implementing an effective education-training program. Foremost of these are:

1. Sunday School:

The Sunday School shall be divided into classes and departments as it grows and conducted under the direction of a director for the study of God's Word. The tasks of the Sunday School shall be to teach the Bible; lead in reaching all

prospects; lead all church members to worship, witness, learn, and minister daily; provide and interpret information regarding the work of the church and denomination.

2. Church Training:

The discipleship program shall serve as the training organization and arm of the church. Its tasks shall be to teach Christian doctrine, ethics, church policy and organization; train leaders for the church and denomination; provide for specialized training for special projects of ministry for the church; and to provide organization and leadership for special activities in the church.

3. Missionary Education Ministry:

There shall be a missionary education with such officers and such forms of organizations to teach missions, lead members to participate in missions, and provide organization and leadership in special missions projects of the church.

K. Outreach Committee:

This committee is under the immediate leadership of the pastor. He forms a committee to develop and implement a strategy for effective programs of community evangelism outreach such as visitation; Bible studies in homes, offices, places of works; special evangelistic meetings inside and outside of the church; and other needed programs to reach people with the gospel. This committee is also responsible for planning training events for soul-winning, as well as the production or securing evangelistic printed materials to be used by the church.

L. Other committees may be formed as needed by the church.

V. Church Meetings

A. Worship Services:

The church shall meet regularly each Sunday morning and evening for the worship of God, for preaching, instruction, evangelism, and on Wednesday, or another night, designated for prayer and Bible study. These meetings will be open for the entire membership of the church and for all people and shall be conducted under the direction of the pastor or designated church officer in the absence of the pastor.

B. Regular Business Meetings:

Regular business meetings shall be held on every first Wednesday of the month. The agenda shall be circulated or made known to the church one week prior to the business meeting. Should there be any unusual meeting or matter of unusual interest to be brought before such regular meeting, notice shall be given to the membership one week prior to that meeting.

C. Special Business Meeting:

A special called business meeting may be called by the pastor, and with other church officers, or by action of the church to consider special matters of significant nature. A one-week written notice or announcement must be given for the especially called business meeting.

D. Quorum:

The quorum consists of those who attend the business meeting, provided it is a stated meeting or one that has been properly called. At least one-fourth of the members shall constitute a quorum.

E. Parliamentary Rules:

Robert's Rules of Order (revised edition) is adopted as the authority for parliamentary rules of procedure for all business meetings of the church and for all other meetings that demand voting of the church members, including committee meetings.

VI. Licensing and Ordaining

A. Licensing:

Any member of the church who has shown by his life and has felt the call to the gospel ministry may by vote of the membership at a regular meeting be licensed by the church to the Christian ministry.

B. Ordination:

When a church of life faith and order shall have called as its pastor a member of this church who possesses scriptural qualifications and as demonstrated by his skills and training for ordination to the work of the gospel ministry, and shall request in writing that he be ordained, or the Church Council recommends him for ordination, a special committee shall be elected to conduct the process of his ordination. Deacons of the church may be ordained as deacons upon the recommendation of the Church Council. The church shall consider such request and by a vote of majority in a regular meeting approve such request. The pastor shall assemble an ordaining council for the ordination of qualified and recommended candidates.

VII. Church Discipline

A. Should any unhappy difference arise among members, the aggrieved member shall follow in a tender spirit, the rules given by our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17.

B. Should any case of gross breach of covenant, or of public scandal occur, the deacons shall endeavor to resolve the conflict; and if this effort fails, shall report the case to the church.

C. All such proceedings shall be pervaded by a spirit of Christian kindness and forbearance, but should an adverse decision be reached, the church may proceed to admonish or declare the offender to be no longer in the membership of the church.

D. Any person whose membership has been terminated for any offense may be restored by vote of the church, upon evidence of his repentance and reformation; or if an account of continued absence, upon satisfactory explanation.

Ratified by action of the church in its business meeting on _____(day/date)_____.

Moderator: _____

Church Clerk: _____

Constitution Bylaws
of
SeaRidge Community Church
(A California Non - profit Religious Corporation)

Article I
Name and Principle Office

The name of this Corporation is_____ Community Church. This Corporation will be further referred to in the Bylaws as the "Church". The Church office is presently located_____. The Church shall have full power and authority to change the principle office from one location to another.

Article II
Purpose

The purpose of this Church is to glorify God by obeying the Great Commandment (Matthew 22: 36-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 18-20). The process is designed to produce disciples of Jesus Christ which involves at least the following four categories.

1. **Worship - (Celebrating)** "To love God with all your heart..." (Matt. 22: 36-40)
2. **Ministry- (Caring)** "Love your neighbor as yourself..."(Matt. 22: 36-40)
3. **Evangelism- (Cultivating)** "Go... and make disciples..." (Matt. 28:18-20)
4. **Discipleship- (Communicating)** "Teach them to observe..."(Matt. 28:18-20)

Article III
Statement of Faith

We affirm the Holy Bible as the inspired Word of God, and as the only basis for our beliefs. Although it is not binding this Church accepts "The Baptist Faith and Message," a 1963 affirmation of basic Christian beliefs, as a general statement of our faith.

Article IV
Affiliation

This Church is autonomous and maintains the right to govern its own affairs, independent of any denomination control. Recognizing, however, the benefits of cooperation with other churches in world mission, this Church voluntarily affiliates with the Southern Baptist Convention in its national, state and local expressions.

Article V
Membership

Section I: General

Membership in this Church shall consist of all persons who have met the requirements for membership, been approved by the congregation and are listed on the membership role.

Section II: Qualifications for Membership

1. A personal commitment of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.
2. Baptism by immersion as a testimony of salvation.
3. Completion of the Church's membership class and its requirements.
4. Basic agreement with the Church's statement of faith.

Section III: Designation of Membership

In an effort to properly reflect the membership of the Church the following membership roll will be maintained.

Active/Resident Members: All members who reside within the Church's ministry area or are currently active in the church.

Section IV: Rights of Membership

Every active/resident member shall have the right to participate in the following matters: The annual budget of the Church, the disposition of all or substantially all of the assets of the Church, the merger or dissolution of the Church, acquisition of property, and amendments to the Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws of the Church.

Section V: Termination of Membership

Members shall be removed from the Church roll for the following reasons:

1. Death.
2. Transfer of membership to another church.
3. By personal request of the member.
4. Dismissal by the congregation/or officers according to the following conditions:
   a. The member's life and conduct is not in accordance with the Statement of Faith in such a way that the member hinders the ministry influence of the Church in the community.
   b. Procedures for dismissal of a member shall be according to Matthew 18:15-17 or Titus 3:10-11.

Section VI: Restoration of Members

Members dismissed by the Church shall be restored by the vote of the Church or the unanimous agreement of the officers according to the spirit of 2 Corinthians 2:7-8.

Section VII: Voting Limitations

Each member is entitled to one vote. Voting by proxy is prohibited.

Article VI
Meetings of Members

Business meetings of the members shall be held in the times, in the manner and the purposes set forth below:

1. An annual meeting of the Church shall be held prior to the beginning of the calendar year. The primary purpose of the meeting is to receive and adopt the annual report and Church budget.
2. The Church may change the dates of the annual or other scheduled meetings by notifying the members at least 10 days in advance.
3. A special business meeting of the church may be called at any time by (a) the Pastor, (b) or in absence of the Pastor by any other officer of the church or by a majority agreement of the Lay Pastors.
4. Notification of members for business meetings may be given by any one of the following methods:

a. Distribution of written material to the congregation in attendance at a Sunday service.
b. Announcement of the meeting in the Church newsletter.
c. Oral announcement to the congregation at a Sunday service.
d. By first-class letter to members.

5. A quorum shall consist of those members present and voting.
6. Members shall be notified no less than 10 days prior to a meeting which consider any matters set forth in Article V section 4 of the Bylaws.

Article VII
Church Officers
(Directors of the Corporation)

Section I:

The officers of the Church will consist of a minimum of three persons. The lay officers will be appointed by the Pastor and approved by the Church annually and will serve for a period of one year. Each officer will be an active/resident member of the Church.

Section II

a. The Senior Pastor will serve as the President of the Corporation and will be the moderator of the Church. He will lead the staff and have the responsibility to hire and dismiss staff as needed. In the Pastors absence a director of the corporation can act as moderator or the church can approve a moderator to serve by majority vote.
b. The Chief Financial Officer of the Corporation will oversee and cause to be kept and maintained, adequate and correct books and records of accounts of the corporation. He shall also oversee the reception and disbursement of funds.
c. The Church Clerk will serve as the Secretary of the Corporation.
d. Other trustee officers shall be appointed by the pastor and approved by the church as needed.

Section III
The officers of the Church are hereby designated as the Directors of the Corporation as the term is defined and used in the _____(Insert State)_____ Nonprofit Corporation Code.

Section IV
It shall be the duty of the Directors (Trustees) to perform two specific tasks.
(1) Act as legal representatives of the church and to take such actions and execute any documents necessary to accomplish the purpose of any matter which concern any real, personal, or intangible property of the Church.
(2) Meet annually with the other non-staff Directors to recommend the Pastor's salary for the annual budget.

Section V
In the event that the pulpit becomes vacant either by the pastor's resignation or the pastor's physical inability to perform the duties of pastor. The pastoral staff will recommend a candidate to the congregation for approval as pastor. In the absence of pastoral staff the congregation can elect a pulpit committee to serve as needed.

Article VIII
Records and Reports

The Church will maintain the following records and reports:

1. Adequate and correct books and records of accounts (financial records).
2. Minutes of the proceedings of its members and Board of Directors.
3. A record of its members, giving their names and addresses.
4. Contribution statements for contributors.
5. Reports of annual review of all church financial books, records, and proceedings.

Article IX

Corporate Responsibility

The property of this corporation is irrevocably dedicated to religious purposes, and no part of the net income or assets of this organization shall ever inure to the benefit of a Director, officer or member of the corporation, or to the benefit of any private individual.

Upon the winding up and dissolution of this corporation, after paying or adequately providing for the debts and obligations of the corporation, the remaining assets shall become the Trust of the _____(Southern) Baptist Association and/or the _____Southern Baptist Convention of _____.

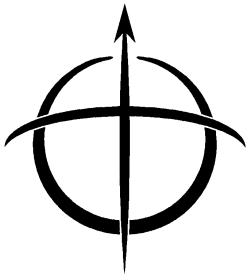
Article X
Amendments to the Bylaws

New Bylaws may be adopted or these Bylaws may be amended or repealed by the affirmative vote of a two-thirds majority of the votes represented at a duly held meeting of the members.

Certificate Of Secretary

I, the undersigned, certify that I am the acting secretary of _____ Community Church, a Nonprofit Religious Corporation and the above Bylaws, consisting of five (5) pages, are the Bylaws of this Corporation as adopted _____, 19__.
Executed at _____, _____this __th day of ____, 19__.

_____
_____, Church Clerk and Secretary



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC
NAMB

To Sample Constitution Recipients:

Welcome to a new phase in the life of your church. As a church grows, each marker or significant step on the journey becomes a joyful experience to be celebrated. As you celebrate a time of covenanting and adopting a constitution, celebrate joyfully the life you have together in Christ.

The Church Planting Group designed the Constitution Packet as a guide for your church as it establishes relationships with other Baptist bodies. Some of the issues you are dealing with are related to formally adopting various documents. The components of the packet will provide a process for this task.

Though the packet will help with the process, an additional study of biblical material will be beneficial. The New Testament, a primer for starting churches, focuses on the Christ event and the expansion of His kingdom on earth through establishing churches. As your church studies the New Testament, it will discover how to be a body of people carrying out the commands of Christ in its context.

Sincerely,

The Church Planting Group

Constitution Module

Contents

Baptists: A Covenant People

Why Constitute?

When Shall We Constitute?

Constitution Module

Baptists: A Covenant People

A church covenant defines relationships and is an objective document that groups of Baptists can use to make decisions related to membership. Churches may adopt several kinds of documents: A statement of faith provides a biblical and spiritual foundation. A constitution defines organizational structure. Articles of incorporation provide legal protection in certain situations. It is the covenant, however, that defines the relational character of the church body.

Christians voluntarily associate together by covenant and thereby constitute—comprise, make up, form—a church. The section on the church in *The Baptist Faith and Message* begins with this statement, "A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth." The word used to describe the believers' connectedness with each other is covenant. A body of people in a covenant relationship under the headship of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit becomes a church.

Churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention are covenantal in nature. People coming together in a covenant relationship that is clearly identified, articulated, and affirmed constitute a church. It is at the point of covenanting together that a church formalizes its existence. The moment a body of people understands that they are the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, God has indeed birthed His church in their midst. The people then begin to intentionally define their covenant with God and with each other.

The "one another" passages in the New Testament give us a clue to the relationships Christians should have in their commitment to each other to be the church. A covenant based on these passages would indicate relational statements. The following is an example of such a covenant.

We, the members of _____Church, do hereby covenant with each other before God to:

> Be family; to be committed to each other; to love, accept, and forgive each other until death or God's call causes us to part.

Live for Jesus Christ and take His commands seriously.

Help one another grow toward Christian maturity by bearing one another's burdens, encouraging one another, exhorting one another, praying for one another, confessing our sins to one another, speaking the truth in love to one another, admonishing one another, submitting to one another, serving one another, patiently bearing with one another, being hospitable to one another, greeting one another, living in peace with one another, regarding one another as more important than ourselves, caring for one another, exercising our spiritual gifts to serve one another, being kind and tenderhearted to one another, being devoted to one another, accepting one another, forgiving one another, loving one another.

Invite one another to pray for us, teach us, correct us, or rebuke us, if necessary, in a spirit of gentleness and humility should we stray from our Lord's commands, because the thing we desire most in life is to serve Christ. We voluntarily submit ourselves to one another and to the discipline of the church. Such discipline will always be for the loving purpose of restoration—restoration to fellowship with God and with the covenant community—and it will always be done in accordance with Matthew 18:15-22.

Bring honor to the body of Christ by maintaining a good testimony.

We enter into this covenant because we have the common purpose of obeying Jesus Christ, and because we believe that we need one another's help to do this.

As believers, and disciples of Jesus Christ, we have entered into a covenant relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—with the God who revealed Himself in Jesus. Since the blessing and promise of the covenant have been freely extended and given to us, out of wonder, love, thanksgiving, and reverence, we hereby accept and take up the covenant responsibilities that go with such privilege. This is our reasonable service and we should do nothing less.

God help us all! We rely on His grace and hold fast to His promise that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

A new congregation should take steps toward adopting a covenant.

Step 1: Develop sensitivity to the Lord's leadership. There comes a time when the Lord "births" His church. At that point, the covenanting process should begin.

Step 2: Lead the congregation in a study of Scripture. Concentrate on the "one another" passages. Examine the New Testament for characteristics of Christians' relationships to each other in a local church.

Step 3: Identify the relational elements that are indispensable in the church. Structure these elements into a document that includes statements of introduction and conclusion.

Step 4: Secure unanimous and personal agreement by every church member. The covenant is a statement that defines the relationships into which new members are received. It also becomes a clear statement for discipline. A covenanting service should be a significant event in the life of a new church. It's not a goal to achieve. It's an outward expression of a church's internal awareness of its status before God—its spiritual birth—as a local expression of the body of Christ. A church should celebrate its covenant often.

Constitution Module

Why Constitute?

As a rule, most church-type missions and new congregations should move deliberately and steadily toward constitution as New Testament churches.

Parents birth, support, and guide their children toward the time when, as adults, they can establish their own homes. In a similar way, a partner (sponsoring) church births, supports, and guides a church-type mission toward maturity. In this way *purpose* is fulfilled.

Guiding the new congregation to constitute enables the partner church to precipitate plans and give direction to the growth of the new congregation. Together, the partner church and the church-type mission can set realistic goals that will help the church-type mission to reach this stage of its development—and beyond.

When the new church is constituted, the partner church experiences victory, joy, and accomplishment. The partner church then focuses more energy on other church-type mission.

Setting a date to constitute helps the new congregation establish a "mile-marker" on its journey toward accomplishing what the Lord wants it to be and do. The new congregation has something to plan for, something to work toward, something to look forward to. Setting a date for constitution helps the church-type mission establish a pattern for planning and working that will bring both stability and growth.

The constitution service is a way of formally recognizing the new church. It acknowledges the maturing congregation and provides a way for the new church to be a full partner within the association. The constitution service gives the new church personal identity in the community and in the denomination.

When a church constitutes, the congregation experiences a sense of accomplishment. It underscores, in a formal way, its autonomy and responsibility for self-support and kingdom expansion through establishing congregations. The constitution service is a significant event in the church's history. The congregation will reach additional mile-markers as it explores God's unique purpose.

The partner church and the new congregation plan for, pray for, and work toward the strength and maturity needed for a new church to constitute. The result likely will be a strong, growing church that accomplishes much for Christ.

Constitution Module

When Shall We Constitute?

Yes or no? Right or Wrong? Now or later? Sooner or later a church-type mission or its partner (sponsor) church faces these questions regarding whether to constitute the new congregation as a church.

While there are no definite answers as to when constitution should take place, several things could be considered. In the West, where distances are great and the new congregation is often as strong as its partner church, the prevailing attitude seems to be, "If it is strong enough to be a church–type mission, it is strong enough to be a church." This seems to have worked well, and many new churches have been constituted. In the South, where a partner church is probably able to give more personal and material support, the church-type mission is usually much stronger before it constitutes.

Jack Redford, in *Planting New Churches*, lists six guidelines that should be considered. He says it is time to constitute when (1) the new congregation has come into a sense of fellowship with Jesus Christ and with each other; (2) the people have come to perceive the biblical basis for their coming together; (3) the people have become aware of community needs, the challenge in their field, and the potential of the field in which their church has been planted; (4) the membership has become numerically and financially adequate to perform the ministry needed in the community; (5) the congregation has had adequate training in the church polity, Christian doctrine, stewardship, and the methods needed by various officers to perform their tasks; and (6) the congregation has become self-supporting and is able to phase out all outside help.

In addition, there are several questions to be considered as constitution is contemplated. One question is, "Are the members sound in Baptist doctrine and polity?" Baptists adhere to certain doctrinal beliefs and are democratic in church polity. Church polity is based on doctrinal beliefs. Unless the members are well grounded in the faith and in practice, frustrations and unnecessary problems will follow. In order to accomplish much as a church, the members must have similar beliefs and know and practice good church polity.

Another question to be faces is, "Are the members morally and ethically responsible?" Unless they are morally and ethically straight, their witness will have a negative effect on the community. Much of Paul's writings deal with how Christians should behave. Christians are not perfect, but the integrity of their lifestyles should challenge their community toward high moral and ethical standards.

A third question is, "Are leaders competent enough to develop a growing, evangelistic, missionary church?" No organization, not even a church, can rise above the level of its

leadership. Spiritual fervor is a must. The training of strong church leaders is a high priority. Leaders must be strong enough to hold the church together and on a steady course.
The new church should also understand the cooperative work of Southern Baptists in mission causes. It should be committed to participation in a world missions program through the association, the state convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention.

To reach full maturity as self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-propagating churches, many existing church-type missions should constitute. The challenge is to consider these suggestions and move toward the goal of constituting.